

The following is one of Henry Anderson's series of commentaries over Station KPFA. It was broadcast on June 26 and 27.

### COURAGE IS NOT ENOUGH

Seven hundred and fifty years ago, there was a Crusade of 7,000 children, who set out from Northern Europe to free the Holy Land from "infidels." They were clad in the raiment of righteousness. They were idealistic. They were courageous. But they were slaughtered and sold into slavery; they did not free the Holy Land.

At this moment, 700 young people are embarked on a crusade from the Northern and Western states to free Mississippi from the "infidels." They are clad in righteousness; they are idealistic; they are courageous. But before the martyrdom of the innocents goes any farther, I hope we will reread some of the history we have forgotten, and relearn some of the hard lessons it teaches us. Among other things, history teaches that while courage is a necessary condition of any social betterment, it is not, by itself, enough.

With all the respect that is due for the courage of the martyrs, I should like to raise a few questions and offer a few recommendations for the consideration of the architects of the civil rights revolution.

To begin with that phrase, "civil rights revolution": I wonder how many people who use it have thought through its implications. When applied indiscriminately to activities in San Francisco and St. Augustine, it reveals a confusion in understanding. If they are to succeed, revolutions cannot afford confusions in understanding.

The established order in California (to the extent there is such a thing at all) may revolve around a morbid fascination with glamour, getting rich quick, the pursuit of pleasure -- but it does not revolve around a morbid fascination with racial ideology. At least not yet. Civil rights in the North is a reform movement, not a revolutionary movement in the correct sense. In the Old South, the established order does revolve around an obsession with race. Civil rights in that context does require a revolution in the accurate sense of the word.

In the accurate sense, a revolution is a turning -- a complete turning. In mechanics, it means the turning of a wheel or a drive-shaft. In human affairs, it means a turning away from one set of social institutions, understandings, and relationships, and the substitution of a different set. It may be parliamentary or it may be otherwise, it may be gradual or it may be otherwise, but it always involves the replacement of one kind of society by another.

Societies are not random accumulations of shreds and patches. They are interrelated and interdependent arrangements which tend to hang together -- or fall apart. You don't just go swimming in a certain place, if the whole social order is arrayed against it. You don't just register voters, if the entire social machinery revolves around a contrary axis. By the time you succeed in going swimming, or registering voters, or whatever was forbidden before, you have done something, whether you know it or not, to every root and branch and twig and leaf of the tree of society. You have done something to religious institutions, family life, commerce, education, the arts....everything.



Has anyone thought through all these consequences? Has anyone scrutinized in detail the meshing of the social order, and anticipated the extent and nature of the changes which will follow in other parts from changes in any one part? How many civil rights revolutionists have carefully thought through the kind of social order they would like as the outcome of their revolution -- in all its roots and branches and twigs and leaves? How many have thought beyond political rights to family patterns and all the hundreds of other folkways and mores that are, in one way or another, bound up with political rights?

Every successful revolutionist, through all the ages, has had to be a kind of intuitive sociologist, with at least a subconscious inkling of how his society is put together, how it functions and moves, and what to do to make it move in a desired direction. For example, it would seem essential for any serious revolutionary to understand, either through intuition or through deliberation, the points at which the old order is weakest and most vulnerable to change, and to concentrate on those rather than flinging his revolutionary resources, which are always limited, in heroic assaults upon those points where the old order is strongest and least vulnerable.

It appears to me that voter registration drives -- although obviously righteous and just, in terms of the professed code of the country as a whole -- are assaults at precisely the level where the established order of the Old South is best prepared to defend itself: namely, the political level. Ever since the federal government lost interest in the reconstruction experiment, in the 1870's, former slaveholders and their sons and grandsons have been building a massive, ingenious political Maginot line. In its construction, they have recognized certain demographic facts which civil rights revolutionists ignore at their peril.

There was a time when Negroes were in a numerical majority in Mississippi and certain other parts of the South. They are not now. Taking the "hard core" states as a whole -- Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina -- Negroes make up just 32% of the population.\* In Mississippi, with the highest percentage, Negroes comprise 42% of the population, but less than that of the voting-age population. Furthermore, the Negro population is distributed unevenly. Among Mississippi's 83 counties, there are just 30 -- or 36% -- in which Negroes of voting age outnumber whites of voting age. In the "hard core" states as a group, only 21% of the counties have a majority of Negro adults. Part of the political Maginot Line which segregationists have been building so carefully so long is a county unit system which takes into account the Negro concentration in certain regions. The system ensures that even if every Negro in the South were somehow to become registered, and were to vote as a bloc, the political machinery of consequence would still rest with the racists.

Assume that the voting provisions of the new Civil Rights Act are seriously enforced by the Department of Justice. It is quite conceivable that the segregationists may simply write off the relatively few areas in which Negroes are in a majority -- turn them into county-wide ghettos with Negro aldermen, Negro justices of the peace, and so on -- analogous to what we already have in Harlem. But all statewide offices, the Democratic and Republican state central committees, the real power, would still reside firmly in the hands of the white supermacists, with their control over the greater number of counties. A political "revolution" of this type, far from breaking the pattern of segregation, could quite possibly consolidate it. It would not be the first movement in history so deflected.

\* The statistics cited in the text have been collected in tabular form, and sources indicated, in a table which follows the body of the commentary.



We need to let our minds range more flexibly and imaginatively beneath the surface of the social order and social processes with which we are dealing. However much we may despise a social order founded on violence and guilt and paranoia, we cannot afford to let our feelings get in the way of our understanding. We cannot change what we do not understand.

One of the most useful single things we can do, in my opinion, is to think back to the beginnings of this peculiar social order. It began with the lust of a landholding class for servile agricultural labor. Negroes were not imported to work in factories or mines or forests. They were imported to work in tobacco, rice, sugar cane, indigo, and, above all, in cotton fields. They were imported to work for those who through accidents of history happened to own the land, but who considered it beneath their dignity to work on the land themselves. Everything else followed. The elaborate rationalizations about racial differences. The appeals to Scripture. The mythology about magnolias and crinoline and chivalry. The Civil War. The Ku Klux Klan. Lynch law. Jim Crow. All of it. The whole, long agony. Right down to the headline in this morning's newspaper.

Sometimes there is a sublime and awesome quality about justice. The lust of the plantation owners, which started the entire agony, may, as lusts have a way of doing, prove to be the fatal weakness in the system. The most vulnerable spot in the structure of the South, it seems to me, is the reliance on disinherited agricultural labor, a reliance which continues to the present day.

For all the changes which have taken place in the past few decades, the South generally, and Mississippi in particular, are still heavily rural. Over 62% of the population of Mississippi is classified as rural, compared, for example, to less than 14% in California. For all the steel mills in Birmingham, for all the textile mills run away from New England, the economic base of the South is still agriculture. Taking the "hard core" states as a whole, in 65% of the counties, agriculture is the principal industry. In no fewer than 60 of Mississippi's 83 counties -- that is, 80% -- agriculture is the main industry.

And this is agriculture of a characteristic type, with characteristic properties. It is not an agriculture of yeomen, of independent, self-sufficient husbandry. It is plantation agriculture, in which those who own the land but do not work on it are dependent -- heavily dependent -- upon the labor of those who do not own the land but do work on it. Agricultural labor in the South assumes two forms: wage labor, paid by the hour or by the unit of production, such as is the pattern in California; and sharecropping or tenant farming, which in actual practice comes close to peonage. Fully 74% of the sharecroppers, and fully 81% of the wage workers in Mississippi agriculture are Negroes. The State -- and, indeed, the South as a whole -- could not survive for more than a few weeks without their labor.

This, I suggest, is the Achilles tendon of the entire racist system: the point at which all the violence and guilt and paranoia betray their essential weakness and vulnerability. The master is, in a real sense, the captive of the slave -- but neither knows it.

The Negro sharecroppers and day laborers of Mississippi and the South potentially possess immense power -- leverage quite beyond that even of the ballot box -- if it were utilized. There is a way to capitalize on it. That is to organize the people who possess this immense latent power in the skill of their rough hands with the things that grow in the soil. So long as Negro sharecroppers and farm laborers are isolated



in spirit as their rude cabins are isolated geographically. they can be ignored by the power structure. But if they ever act in concert, they can wring concessions from the power structure more fundamental than anything to be gained by demonstrations in the streets of urban centers.

When I speak of rural organizing, I do not mean orthodox, hidebound unionism. I would scrupulously avoid any connection with the so-called labor movement. I would avoid the very term union. "Improvement associations," or "service organizations" would probably be preferable terms. The organizing should be quiet, painstaking, door-to-door, without fanfare. First, simply starting a process of communication. Then, gaining confidence of members and prospective members by proving the usefulness of the organization in small, concrete ways. To the disinherited, the problem of what you do when your child has a 105 degree fever may be much more meaningful than how you go about registering to vote. Organizing should, insofar as possible, begin within the lives of the disinherited as they perceive them, and build toward the type of inheritance they themselves envisage, rather than a vision imported from the urban, college, liberal or radical North, however rational or ennobling that imported vision might be.

If one built along these lines, securely, wisely and well, the time would come, soon enough, when the members of the organization would have enough confidence in their organization -- which is to say, in themselves -- to begin taking risks, making sacrifices, taking collective action, making demands. In the case of a worker organization, this means withholding, or threatening to withhold the labor of their hands, until justice, as they define it, is done.

Compared to marshalling a show of strength on the county courthouse lawn, it would be uncomplicated. You wouldn't ask sharecroppers, from twenty miles around, to congregate in any one place, where they would be targets for clubs, cattle prods, tear gas, and police dogs. They would just stay at home, instead of going out and chopping cotton. If they were evicted, they would just sit down beside the road, as sharecroppers did in Southeastern Missouri in 1929. You must have plans, of course, to provide food, and tents, and medical care. A civil rights movement which is capable of raising millions of dollars for bail and fines and legal aid is surely capable of providing for the mundane necessities of life.

Worker organizations have generally defined justice in terms of money in the pay envelope, job security, working conditions, grievance procedures, union recognition. Perhaps an organization of rural Southern Negro agricultural workers would conceive justice in the same terms. Perhaps it would not. There is no reason why labor could not be withheld until county voter registration procedures were changed, until Negroes were admitted to a school, or any number of things. It is not for me to say what the objectives should be. Nor, if I may make so bold, is it for Snick, or CORE, or anybody else to say -- anybody other than the disinherited themselves.

But I do know this much: once the disinherited of the earth -- whichever disinherited -- achieve, through their own efforts, a modicum of justice -- however they define it -- it starts a process which extends before it is through into every recess of the social order; which grows and gathers momentum until, in the words of the prophet, "justice rolls down like the waters."

Now, I have naturally had to oversimplify. In fifteen minutes, it is impossible to discuss the multiplication table -- much less revolutions -- without



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oversimplifying. There would be strenuous opposition from the established order to the organizing of "rural development associations", by whatever name. There would be injunctions and special ordinances and night ridings and a whole battery of legal and extralegal counterrevolutionary measures.

But let me point out that it is not idle armchair speculation to talk of organizing the sharecroppers and day laborers of the rural South. It has been done. Everyone seriously interested in the civil rights revolution ought to memorize the story of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, which, in the 1930's, organized at least 35,000 of the disinherited, mostly Negroes, mostly in the Mississippi delta. In many ways, the problem was even more formidable then than now. The country was in the grip of its gravest depression. The Ku Klux Klan rode without challenge. But the Southern Tenant Farmers Union lived and grew. The machinations of domestic Communists, and the guns of World War II brought its demise, but while it lasted it was one of the most important ventures in the history of American radicalism. I hope to say more about it in future commentaries.

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Not the least of the practical problems in an essentially rural revolution, such as I am suggesting, is that the civil rights movement has already taken on many of the aspects of institutionalization. In a real sense, it has a vested interest in urbanism. Its leaders think in urban terms; its tactics are peculiarly suited to urban settings. An agrarian emphasis would require a change within the civil rights movement itself scarcely less dramatic than the change the civil rights movement seeks within the racist social order.

The most that can realistically be asked of the civil rights revolution. I suppose, is that it diversify -- that it allocate some of its resources to developing the latent economic power of rural Southern Negroes, at the same time that it continues to do what it can to channel the rage and frustration of urban Negroes. If the revolution diversifies in such a manner, I believe the economic approach, while less spectacular, will prove more effective than direct confrontations in the political arena and clashes in the bubbling asphalt streets.

If this proves to be the case, it will be because the economic approach rests on a more insightful understanding of the social order, the mortar which holds it together, its flaws and the way they can be exploited. History, as we have observed, instructs us that a right cause, idealism, altruism, and courage are not enough. But when righteousness and courage are put in the service of understanding, or vice versa -- and this has happened a few times in the human pilgrimage -- a better society, a more nearly free society, a more nearly just society, may result. We trust that this is one of those times in the human pilgrimage, and that such a society will be the result of the civil rights revolution in the United States of America.

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READER: Delegates to the annual convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, march one by one to receive a portion of this earth brought by your brother delegates from the states in which they struggle for a better life. Gather now a few grains from the soil of Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Texas, where the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union is a living force. Mingle these grains in one heap -- as a symbol of the land on which we live and labor. ... By means of this ceremony we have dedicated our lives to the task of securing land, freedom and bread...

AUDIENCE: The land is the common heritage of the people.

READER: Land to the landless.

AUDIENCE: To the disinherited belongs the future.

READER AND AUDIENCE: Speed now the day when the plains and the hills and all the wealth thereof shall be the people's own and free men shall not live as tenants of men on the earth which Thou hast given to all. Amen.

STFU: Ceremony of the Land.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION,  
"HARD-CORE" SOUTHERN STATES,  
1960<sup>a</sup>

Characteristics	"Hardcore" South, Total	Missis- sippi	Louisiana	Alabama	Georgia	South Carolina
Total population	15,027,613	2,178,141	3,257,022	3,266,740	3,943,116	2,382,594
White, percent	67.4%	57.7%	67.9%	69.9%	71.4%	65.1%
Nonwhite, percent	32.5%	42.3%	32.1%	30.1%	28.6%	34.9%
Urban population	7,834,754	820,805	2,060,606	1,791,721	2,180,236	981,386
White, percent	69.1%	64.0%	68.7%	69.0%	70.3%	71.4%
Nonwhite, percent	30.9%	36.0%	31.3%	31.0%	29.7%	28.6%
Rural population	7,192,859	1,357,336	1,196,416	1,475,019	1,762,880	1,401,208
White, percent	65.5%	53.9%	66.5%	71.0%	72.8%	60.7%
Nonwhite, percent	34.5%	46.1%	33.5%	29.0%	27.2%	39.3%
Counties	414	83	63	66	156	46
White majority, <sup>1</sup> pct.	79.2%	63.9%	84.1%	81.8%	87.8%	67.4%
Nonwhite majority, <sup>1</sup> pct.	21.8%	36.1%	15.9%	18.2%	12.2%	32.6%
Agricultural, <sup>2</sup> percent	64.7%	79.5%	65.6%	63.6%	59.6%	54.4%
Total employment	4,944,828	682,339	1,007,812	1,065,897	1,385,047	803,733
White, percent	71.2%	63.1%	71.6%	73.3%	73.9%	70.0%
Nonwhite, percent	28.8%	36.9%	28.4%	26.7%	26.1%	30.0%
Hired farm workers	296,901	96,658	45,618	45,814	60,144	48,667
White, percent	29.6%	19.2%	34.8%	42.7%	37.0%	22.0%
Nonwhite, percent	70.4%	80.8%	65.2%	57.3%	63.0%	78.0%
Sharecroppers	56,346	22,339	4,238	8,582	10,412	10,775
White, percent	25.2%	13.2%	20.2%	45.5%	41.1%	19.5%
Nonwhite, percent	74.8%	86.8%	79.8%	54.5%	58.9%	80.5%
Farm owners <sup>3</sup>	366,968	93,810	56,019	83,539	79,883	53,717
White, percent	81.8%	75.9%	84.5%	84.2%	89.9%	73.5%
Nonwhite, percent	18.2%	24.1%	15.5%	15.8%	10.1%	26.5%

a: Data on farm ownership and tenancy are from agricultural census of 1959.

1: Majority of the population 21 years of age and over.

2: Counties with a plurality of the labor force employed in agriculture.

3: Includes part-owners.

SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Census of Population: 1960. General Population Characteristics (Series PC 1-B), and General Social and Economic Characteristics (Series PC 1-C).

U.S. Bureau of the Census. U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1959. Vol. I, Counties, Parts 27, 28, 32, 33, 35.

(Adapted and arranged.)